

# **Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes**

June 10, 2021

Michigan History Center

**Commissioners in attendance (all by Zoom):** Laura Ashlee (Okemos, MI), Joseph Calvaruso (Galesburg, MI), Timothy Chester (Grand Rapids, MI), Brian James Egen (Monroe, MI), Delia Fernandez (Lansing, MI), Eric Hemenway (Harbor Springs, MI), Robin Terry (Detroit, MI) and Larry Wagenaar (Lansing, MI).

**Excused Absence:** Tom Truscott

**Staff (all by Zoom):** Sandra Clark (Holt, MI), Michelle Davis (Middleton, MI), Wayne Lusardi (Alpena, MI), Troy Masserant (East Lansing, MI) and Tobi Voigt (Lansing, MI).

President Egen called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

**Approval of Agenda:** Chester moved to approve the agenda as presented; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Chester moved to approve the April 29, 2021, meeting minutes as amended; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously adopted on a roll call vote.

**Public Comment on Items Not related to an Existing Agenda Item:** There were no comments during this portion of the meeting.

## **Director's Report**

- Questions/Requests for further information – Chester asked for more information on the audit currently being performed at the Center. Clark stated this is a routine audit being conducted by the Auditor General's office. The last audit was conducted in 2006. The current audit appears to be focusing on various databases and the tracking of archival and museum objects.
- Re-opening Communications – State government is scheduled to have employees return to state offices beginning July 12, 2021. The Center, like other parts of DNR, will do a rolling opening to the public. Beginning in August, the Archives will reopen for four hours a day, Monday through Friday, by appointment only. The Museum will open Friday through Sunday, also starting in August. Staff return to the office will be voluntary with flexible schedules until September 7.

Clark asked for commissioner input on reopening strategies. Commissioners agreed that communication is key and having safety protocols in place to help make visitors feel as safe as possible. This means information should be communicated at every point possible prior to arrival at the Center. The public should not be surprised by the safety measures when they arrive at the facility. Also, it may be important to limit capacity and ensure social distancing in this type of setting.

The Senate's first budget proposal does not include general funds to cover rent for the state-owned Lansing facilities.

Clark noted that the new "I Voted" exhibit at the Center, which was to open before the 2020 election, is scheduled to open in August. She asked for commissioner input on ways to introduce the exhibit. The discussion focused on the importance of connecting the past to the present, using historical content on restrictions in voting rights and suffrage.

Fernandez noted an online software program titled Rewordify that may be helpful in making programs/exhibits more user friendly for a variety of audiences.

The discussion then moved to possible ways of moving forward with online and in-person education at the Center. It was noted there has been some decline in participation in online programming; however, it remains important to move forward with virtual programs and online experiences.

### **Agenda for September Meeting Discussion**

- **Awards** – Egen noted the Awards Committee disbanded some time ago. Egen will put together a summary for discussion at the September 2021 meeting.
- **Other** –
  - Discuss the large marker audit project – reassess the progress that has been made, the information that has been gathered, what the next steps/action items should be and what role the commission should play going forward. Part of that discussion could involve the marker graduate assistant's grant project that he has been working on that relates to the marker audit project.
  - Commission and Center's five-year plan
  - DEAIJ work at the Center

### **Marker Program**

- **Community Audit Project** – Clark reported that the Center applied for a National Endowment for the Humanities Covid Grant to hire someone familiar with Detroit to work on the Grant House and the Historical Marker Program. Troy has put together a pilot marker audit project for Ypsilanti. The local community foundation or the Michigan Humanities Council are potential sources of funding.
- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for four new marker applications. (Appendix A)
  - ◆ **Integrating East Lansing, East Lansing, Ingham County**
  - ◆ **St. Peter Lutheran Church, Macomb, Macomb County**
  - ◆ **Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School, Ferndale, Oakland County**
  - ◆ **Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Detroit, Wayne County**

Wagenaar moved to approve the broader story of the Integrating East Lansing marker application with the possible mention of Dr. Robert Green and Mr. Carl Levin as incidental to the story in the marker text; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and on a roll call vote was unanimously approved.

Chester moved to approve the St. Peter Lutheran Church marker application focusing on the congregation as presented; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and on a roll call vote it was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School marker application as presented; the motion was seconded by Terry and on a roll call vote it was unanimously approved.

Ashlee moved to approve the Cathedral Church of St. Paul marker application as presented; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and on a roll call vote it was unanimously approved.

- **Approval of Marker Text** – Marker text was provided for one new marker application.
  - ◆ **Amity Lodge #335/The Spiritual Israel Church and Its Army, Detroit, Wayne County**

Ashlee moved to approve the Amity Lodge #335/The Spiritual Israel Church and Its Army marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Terry and was unanimously approved on a roll call vote.

➤ **Reports**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.
  - Ashlee asked for an update on the Underhill Store historical marker that is noted on the report as “pending - marker repair fund program.” Davis reported that in 1996 a letter was sent to the property owner asking to have the original marker returned for salvage because the building it referenced had been torn down. A few years ago, Davis come across the file and once again reached out to the property owner asking to have the marker returned for salvage. Negotiations have not been easy. A compromise has been reached that if a replacement marker is approved, the property owner will return the marker. Davis is currently working with the village of Dimondale on a replacement text that focuses more on the entire village. Ashlee felt the Center may want to move forward with asking DNR Law Enforcement to assist.
  - Chester noted that the Vandenburg Center marker had been erected and agreed to verify that it is in the location approved by the commission in 2019.

**Business Updates**

- Report of Nominating Committee – Ashlee reported that the nominating committee meet to discuss the current nominations. Given the current pandemic situation the committee noted the importance of continuity in the coming year and decided to move forward with nominating Egen as president and Chester as vice president. Wagenaar moved to accept the recommendations of the nominating committee; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and adopted unanimously on a roll call vote with Egen and Chester abstaining.
- “America 250” – After the previous commission meeting, Egen and Hemenway expressed an interest in serving on this committee. Clark asked if anyone else has interesting in serving. Fernandez agreed to be a representative as well.

**Public Comments** – There were no public comments during this portion of the meeting.

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Wagenaar shared some recent Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) \ staff changes; Nancy Feldebush left for a new position, Emily Allison is the new Editor in Chief and some internal promotions occurred. The coming UP History Conference is the second to the last virtual replacement to an existing history conference. Recently launched, the Michigan Heritage Home program recognizing homes that are over 100 years old and substantially intact. The applicant will be required to provide substantial documentation and if approved they will receive a cast aluminum dark brown plaque. This might be an alternative for those homes that are not eligible for a Michigan Historical Marker.
  - Egen congratulated Hemenway and Ashlee for being reappointed to the commission. Egen shared that the Monroe County Museum systems successfully passed its millage renewal and increase in May 2021.
  - Hemenway is currently working on four pre-covid exhibits that had been dormant for quite some time, as well as cemetery clean-up projects. He has been approached by Wayne State to write a book and will begin working on that. He is looking forward to doing a Ted Talk in July in Alpena.
  - Ashlee noted the appointment process was much more rigorous this time around.
  - Fernandez is waiting for her book to come back from the press.
  - Terry shared that the Motown Museum just completed phase I of its construction project. Phase II will begin in September, and the museum will be closed for eleven months. She is finding various projects in order to keep staff on board during the closure. Terry asked if anyone has a good recommendation for an architectural conservator that might assist with assessing the Hitsville House in Detroit.
  - Chester shared that he is working with a number of clients, three of which are located in Michigan. The Theodore Roethke historic houses located in Saginaw is one of them. Mr. Roethke was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, who was a student of Robert Frost. The current project is establishing the two historic houses on the property as a center for poetry and writing. Chester is also working with the Kingman Museum in Battle Creek to help reposition its future. The Zeeland Historical Society has done a complete turnaround and recently hired a fulltime curator/archivist and a fulltime professional executive director. Chester reminded the commission that he serves on the board for the Michigan History Foundation as a representative for the commission. There is one more spot available for another commissioner to serve and Chester would like to have someone join him. Conversation ensued about the commissioner roles on the Foundation. Anyone who is interested in serving should contact Clark know.
- Clark shared that the Department of Natural Resources is in the process of hiring a DNR archaeologist who will report to the Center but serve the whole department. With the assistance of grant funds, Julia Stark has been hired to evaluate some older museum collections for compliance with the federal Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso; and the meeting adjourned at 12:25 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sandra S. Clark", is positioned above a horizontal line. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses  
Michigan Historical Commission  
June 10, 2021

## Integrating East Lansing

**Applicant:** Adam Delay, Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan

**Location Address:** 207 Bessemaur Dr, between Abbot Rd and Columbine Dr, East Lansing, Ingham County

**Requested Marker Type:** Large marker with different text on each side.

Prior to 1968 deed restrictions and racial housing covenants made it difficult for African Americans to buy a home in the City of East Lansing. Realtors and neighborhood groups often refused to sell any homes to African Americans. Property for sale became “unavailable” when African Americans showed interest, or other “buyers” might make a deposit. This is what happened to Dr. Robert Green, a professor at Michigan State University and member of the East Lansing Human Relations Commission, when he looked for a home in East Lansing in 1964.

Green wrote to Governor Romney for assistance. Romney advised that he file a complaint with the newly created Michigan Civil Rights Commission (MCRC). Michigan’s 1963 constitution created the MCRC and gave it general authority to “investigate alleged discrimination” and “secure the equal protection” of civil rights.

Green charged Rex J. Frink—the owner of the house he tried to purchase and a licensed real estate agent of the Walter Neller Company—with racial discrimination in March 1964. He filed complaints with the MCRC, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Lansing and East Lansing Human Relations Commissions, and the State Corporation and Securities Commission.

On April 1, 1964, the FHA summoned Green and Frink to an informal hearing in Grand Rapids. In addition, the MCRC assigned an attorney, Carl Levin, to Green’s case. Levin filed a cease-and-desist order that named Walter Neller as the realtor who blocked Green’s efforts. The MCRC eventually ruled that Neller must make the home available for purchase. Green refused to financially support Neller and bought a different home in East Lansing on June 26, 1964.

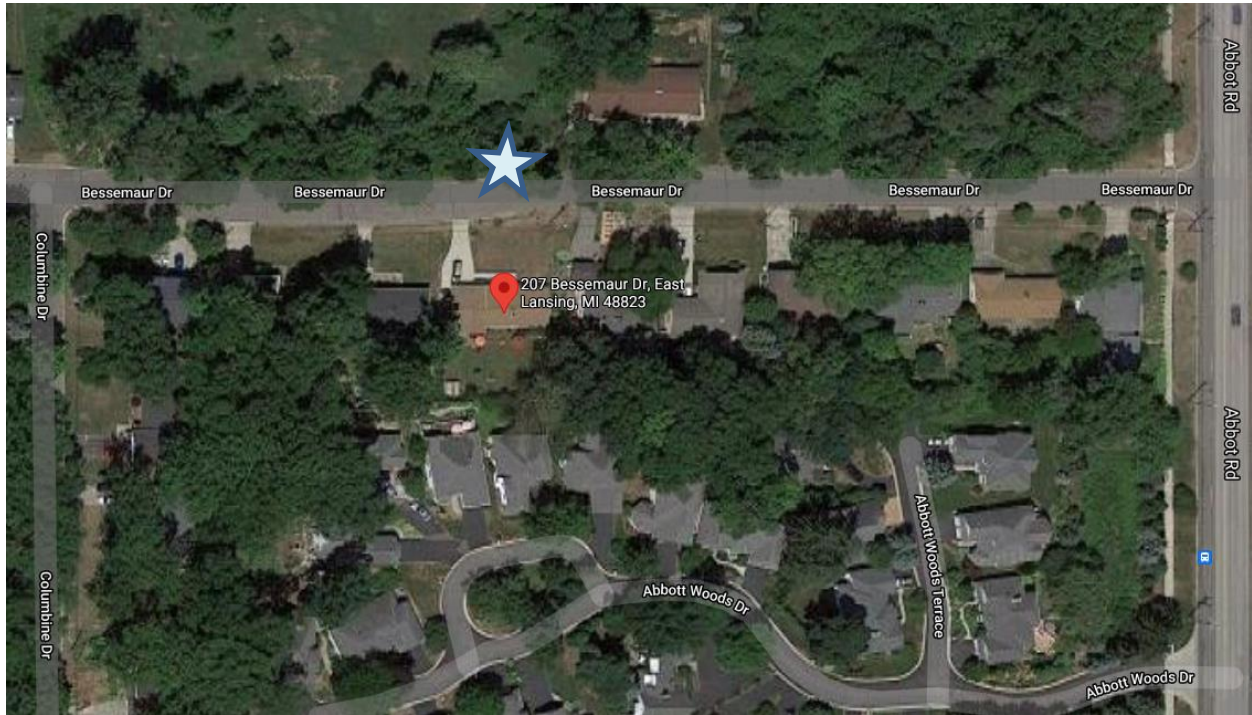
From its creation in 1963 until 1968, the Human Relations Commission made multiple attempts to pass an ordinance prohibiting racial discrimination in public housing. It was unable to get a majority vote until April 8, 1968. Ordinance No. 213 prohibited racial discrimination in all aspects of public housing. On April 15, 1968, the commission amended the ordinance to include a penalty clause. Those convicted of discriminatory practices outlined in the ordinance could be fine up to \$500 or imprisonment up to ninety days.

In February 2018, the City of East Lansing issued a formal apology for the widespread presence of racial discrimination in its history. It condemned the deed restrictions and covenants remaining in the language of some East Lansing neighborhood’s property deeds. While these restrictions are unenforceable, the residents have been unable to eliminate the language from the documents.

### Recommendation:

Housing integration in East Lansing is an important topic that should be addressed in a Michigan historical marker. However, the sponsor tailored the narrative of this application to focus on Dr. Robert Green, and the proposed location for the marker is across the street from the home Dr. Green purchased June 26, 1964. Dr. Robert Green is still active in the community and Michigan State University. Carl Levin is also an active figure. Because of the major role Dr. Green played in this story, we ask the commission to consider whether he and Levin could be mentioned in the marker. This would be an exception to the policy of not naming living people on markers. We do not believe Green should be the primary focus. A wider focus on housing integration may be more appropriate.

**Proposed Marker Location:**



# St. Peter Lutheran Church

**Applicant:** Shelly Fowler

**Location Address:** 17051 24 Mile Road, Macomb, Macomb County

**Requested Marker Type:** Large marker with different text on each side.

The history of St. Peter Lutheran Church's congregation in Macomb county is tied to the widespread immigration of Germans to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Their history links the area and congregation with Mecklenburg, Germany. Founded in 1882, St. Peter Lutheran Church has served its community for more than 139 years. Its two longest running service organizations, the Walther League and the Ladies Aid Society, were established in the mid-1920s. These organizations, among many others, have funded treatment for the sick, aid for the disabled, community improvement projects, and more in their community and abroad.

February 20, 1882, thirty members of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Waldenburg—an area in Macomb Township—founded St. Peter Lutheran Church. At the start of construction for their new church, the charter members wrote a letter to their descendants and laid it in the church's cornerstone May 29, 1882. A translated copy of that letter begins, "We, your ancestors, once immigrated from Germany, from Mecklenburg, to this new western land America to begin a new home." The letter then explains how they founded St. Peter Lutheran Church to be closer to their homes. These German roots predominantly shaped the congregation and community. Census data from 1880 for Macomb Township indicates that of the 2,046 people enumerated, approximately 1,296 were foreign-born or second-generation Germans. The charter documents of the church, as well as the meeting minutes of some of its first organizations, were recorded in German. Through both world wars and into the 1950s, St. Peter Lutheran Church conducted English and German church services.

Beginning in the 1840s, an exodus of German Lutherans seeking religious freedom left their homeland for the United States and other countries. The revolutions of 1848 in Europe compounded this exodus, prompting many Germans to flee from the unrest. Between 1850 and 1890 the population of foreign-born individuals in Michigan increased from 54,000 to 540,000. The total number of foreign-born Germans in the United States during this same period rose from approximately 580,000 to 2.8 million.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:**





# Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School

**Applicant:** Brigitte R. Hall, Friends of Royal Oak Township, Inc.

**Location Address:** 21131 Garden Ln, Ferndale, Oakland County.

**Requested Marker Type:** Large marker with different text on each side.

Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School was built in 1926 during an extended period of population growth in Ferndale. Upon completion of the school, the Ferndale School District limited its attendance area exclusively to the Forest Grove and Detroyal subdivisions—two predominantly Black neighborhoods located near the Eight Mile-Wyoming area. Until this time, Black students freely attended schools throughout the district. Mandatory attendance areas relocated almost all Black students to Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School. The remaining schools in the district became primarily white schools.

The population growth in the area led to periods of overcrowding in Ferndale schools. For Ulysses S. Grant Elementary School, these periods were often artificially prolonged. Between 1926-1970, Grant operated over capacity several times. Despite district policy, students were not transferred out of Grant to other schools operating under capacity. Overcrowding at Grant became so extreme from 1939 through 1942 that the school implemented half-day sessions to educate its students.

In 1969, as part of the Nixon administration's "crackdown on the subtle forms of school segregation" in Northern states, the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) closely investigated segregation complaints in Northern school districts. The Ferndale School District became the first district in the North to be officially found in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as well as the first to have its federal aid revoked.

When the school district refused to negotiate with HEW and failed to provide a desegregation plan for Grant Elementary School in 1969, it became the focus of a decade long legal battle. HEW conducted an official hearing in 1969 that ruled Grant school was *de jure* segregated and terminated the district's federal funds. In 1976, the Attorney General of the United States filed a desegregation suit against the Ferndale School District under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

In 1978, the District Court in Detroit found that the school's all black faculty represented *de jure* segregative conduct from the school district and ordered the district to remedy the situation. However, the court concluded that the decision to build the school was "not motivated by an intent to segregate the black children in the area," that "the children in the Grant school attendance area are segregated because of *de facto* reasons," not *de jure*, and that there was no continuing segregative effect that would require the school to desegregate its students.

The District Court's ruling was appealed to the Sixth Circuit Court and reversed. The Circuit Court found "the creation of the Grant School was motivated by racial reasons and was intentionally segregative in purpose and effect," and that the school was intentionally operated "in violation of the Constitution of the United States." The Circuit Court ordered the Ferndale School District create a desegregation plan, as well as wipe out "the vestiges of segregation" in their district— "root and branch." The court ordered desegregation plan in Ferndale went into effect January 5, 1981.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:**



# Cathedral Church of St. Paul

**Applicant:** Cathedral Church of St. Paul

**Location Address:** 4800 Woodward Ave, SE corner of Woodward and Warren, Wayne County

**Requested Marker Type:** Large marker with different text on each side.

The Reverend Richard Cadle led the incorporation of the Church of St. Paul in 1825. It was the first Episcopal church in Michigan. The Church of St. Paul purchased a lot on the corner of Woodward Avenue and Hancock Street in 1889 for the construction of its new cathedral. Built in the Gothic style by the architects, Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, the Cathedral Church of St. Paul was consecrated in 1911. The cathedral remains unfinished. The belltower in the original architectural design was never constructed. In 1922, the cathedral became one of the first in Detroit to broadcast its church services, which continued until 1988. Several Detroit leaders, including Henry Ford, were members of the congregation. April 10, 1947, St. Paul's Cathedral Church held Henry Ford's funeral service, which approximately twenty thousand Detroiters attended.

After the uprising in Detroit in 1967, the cathedral became the headquarters of the Interfaith Emergency Center, a unified effort from Detroit's Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities to bring food and other emergency supplies to people and areas affected by the violence. The cathedral was the base of operations for twenty-five collection centers and twenty-one distribution stations. Nine trucks manned by union workers from the AFL-CIO and UAW helped distribute supplies donated to the center. The Mayor's Committee on Human Resource Development, United Community Services, the Red Cross, and the Detroit Public School system officially backed and supported the efforts of the Interfaith Emergency Center.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:**



